

“Why Communion is so Important” Part 1 - 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 – October 18th, 2015

- Today's teaching will be part one of a new series I've titled, "Why Communion is so Important."
 - Before we jump into this, there are a couple of things I need to point out, the first of which is Corinthians is a corrective epistle.
 - As such, it's filled with correction and instruction for a carnal and worldly church that was riddled with division and dissention.
 - The second thing I need to point out has to do with the cultural dynamics there in Corinth as it relates to the communion table.
 - It's believed the early church partook together of the communion table on a weekly basis, and it was likely a Sunday afternoon.
 - However, before they partook of the communion, they had what was known as an Agape Feast, or if you prefer a "Love Feast."
 - I suppose you could liken their Love Feasts to what we do when we eat together as a church both on Thursday's and Sunday's.
 - Actually, eating together is very important in the Middle-Eastern culture to this day because of the intimate bond that is formed.
 - Culturally, the belief in eating together makes you one with those whom you break bread with, whether you were rich or poor.
- One wrote, "It is likely that in the first century the Lord's Supper was part of a larger meal, the love feast, where fellowship was expressed, and the poor were fed. Beginning in the second century, the love feast and the Lord's Supper became separated."
- In Jude 11–13 we have a mention of these love feasts and it's in the context of the false teachers ...11 Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion. 12 These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. 13 They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.
- One commentator aptly noted how that, "Jude mines heaven and earth to find six metaphorical examples of the behavior of the false teachers. First, he says they are "blemishes at your love feasts." This is the only place the word "love feast" is used in the New Testament, although the practice is described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:20–22. The false teachers are "blemishes" or "reefs at the love feasts. If "blemishes" or "spots" is the correct translation then they are like cancers on the body of Christ. However, in keeping with the nature metaphors that follow, "reefs" is a better translation. The false teachers are like dangerous coral reefs that cause others to shipwreck their faith.
- Suffice it to say, there were serious problems developing because of these love feasts, which is why Paul bluntly rebukes them.
 - It seems not only were there false teachers taking advantage of this, there were true Christians also taking advantage of this.
 - So much so, they had turned this into a drunken party of sorts, and in so doing they were selfishly disgracing the Lord's Supper.
 - Enter the text before us today, and with it, the reasons why the communion table, like God's ordained authority, is so important.
 - My hope and prayer for us as a church is that this series will clear up much of the confusion surrounding the communion table.
 - More specifically, that it will answer the unanswered questions concerning the paramount importance of the communion table.
- 1. It's a revelation of those whom God approves (Verses 17-19)**
- v17 Paul rebukes them saying in the following directives there's no praise for them, as their meetings do more harm than good.
 - v18 He says first he's heard and to some extent believes when they come together as a church there are divisions in the church.
 - v19 He then says that doubtless the differences among them are in fact to show them which of them have the approval of God.
 - What Paul is saying here is the problem was so serious it was doing more damage than good whenever they met as a church.
 - Moreover, the factions and divisions among them were exacerbating this problem, which in turn exposed those causing them.
 - What I find interesting is Paul's mention of these divisions eventually exposing who among them actually has God's approval.
- I like how one commentator said it, "We usually think of factions and divisions among Christians as nothing but a problem. But Paul reveals a purpose God has in allowing factions: that those who are approved may be recognized among you. God allows factions so that, over time, those who really belong to God would be made evident."
- 2. It's a unification of the body of Christ (Verses 20-22)**
- v20 Paul calls them out because when they come together they were to partake of the Lord's Supper, but they wouldn't do that.
 - v21 He rebukes them for eating together in small groups, which results in some remaining hungry and others are getting drunk.
 - v22 He says they can eat and drink in their homes, but they despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing.
 - In order for us to understand what really happened at these love feasts, it's important to know that many of them were slaves.
 - It's been suggested there were as many as seven million slaves during this period of time in the history of the Roman Empire.
 - As such, many of these Christian slaves who were in the Corinthian church were simply unable to bring any food for the feast.
 - If this weren't bad enough the Christians who were wealthy and could bring food for the feast would not share it with the slaves.
 - This is why Paul rebukes them for their cliques within the church. It seems they had private parties and slaves weren't invited.
 - I suppose you could say that they were doing the exact opposite and separated the communion, which was to be communal.
 - As we get towards the end of this chapter we're going to see just how serious this matter was, so much so that some would die.
 - This because, they posed a threat to the body of Christ by virtue of the fact that they were harming the church by what they did.
 - In closing let me simply say it is virtually impossible to overstate the importance of a church body that is united and approved.